

Opening Statement of Honorable Donna Christensen

Chairwoman, Subcommittee on Insular Affairs

Oversight Hearing on the U.S. Military Buildup of Guam and Challenges Facing the
Community

August 13, 2007

Good morning and Hafa Adai.

Let me begin by thanking the University of Guam and its President Harold Allen for hosting us today. There is no better place to conduct a hearing than at a Public University -- a place that promotes not only education and a free exchange of ideas but also creates a strong community. The staff and faculty have been wonderful to work with and we truly appreciate all the assistance they have provided in helping to put this hearing together.

It is truly an honor to be here on the beautiful island of Guam, where America's day begins, and where our Nation's westernmost border also begins.

As our country better prepares to protect our people and our homeland we are all challenged by change.

Nowhere though is the challenge greater than on Guam as we look to the potential military buildup planned for this island paradise – this piece of America closest to Asia.

It is therefore fortuitous that there is a Subcommittee on Insular Affairs which was re-established by the House Natural Resources Full Committee Chairman Nick Rahall, at the beginning of the 110th Congress. I believe Chairman Rahall recognized that our U.S. territories, and also those island nations freely associated with the United States, have great challenges in front of them today.

Developing and diversifying economies, preserving culture and language, protecting the environment, resolving political status – these issues are not new, nor are they exclusive to any one territory. They are issues that have no immediate solution and they require time, energy, political will power, debate, deliberation, and compromise to reach resolution.

We are here this morning because an additional set of issues has presented itself in the past few years. It is

one that is exclusive to Guam, as there is no other territory or State in our Union, which has undergone what Guam could potentially undergo if a final decision is made to buildup the military presence here on Guam.

This Subcommittee is here, with you, on Guam because we are prepared to be your partners on this path. As the chair of this Subcommittee, and as a representative of your sister Territory in the Caribbean, I want to be sure that we are engaged and that military planners and your own leaders are aware that we are sensitive to the concerns which will be raised throughout this process. We are prepared to see that challenges become opportunities, concerns are replaced with confidence, and obstacles overcome with advocacy.

Along with me today is your Delegate, Madeleine Bordallo. She and I have a strong relationship and it is because of her determination that we begin this step with you. In Congress she has been steadfast in representing the interests of the people of Guam. It is because of her that I was happy to take on your fight revisiting the issue of providing equity to Guam for war claims resulting

from the island's World War II occupation. It was a fight with an overwhelming result as the House of Representatives passed by more than a two-thirds majority in favor of the Guam World War II Loyalty Recognition Act. I continue to work with Ms. Bordallo to have the Senate act on her legislation because claims should be revisited and equity restored.

During the past few days of my visit here, I have begun to get a good sense of what the big military picture is and how the plans for Guam are beginning to take shape. We have also heard from different sectors of the Guam community. Many are hopeful and positive though there is midst of uncertainty. The questions run the gamete – infrastructure, schools, business, culture, society, healthcare, roads, housing, labor – these are all very fair and appropriate concerns that any community would have.

So, the challenge, for now, is two-fold. Determining the new role of Guam in defending our Nation; and defining the Federal government's responsibility to the people of Guam as this

determination unfolds. The first can only be done by military planners and driven by threats on our Nation; the latter cannot be done without the input of the people of Guam.

Today we will be receiving testimony which will build upon those first impressions, and which will also begin to build the congressional record on the military buildup and the possible impact on the Guamanian people.

It is important to remember that we are only at the beginning of a process which only the most optimistic project will end in 2014. So time is on all of our side.

All of the right elements are here. All that is needed is a commitment to work collaboratively to make the buildup the success I know this can be.